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Editorial: Smoking is being filtered out

July 17, 2010

Glendale has come a long way down the path of cessation, of smoking that is.

In a city that once seemed destined to remain an also-ran in the race by local governments to restrict secondhand smoke, Glendale has rebounded to the head of the pack. Now, smoking in most publicly accessible places is illegal — from restaurant patios to bus stops and parks.

But a war has also been raging on the back end, the point of sale. Health officials and regulators have for years cracked down on merchants selling tobacco products to minors, teens particularly vulnerable to the marketing and peer pressure of smoking. And to get hooked at such a young age could mean decades more of lung damage, and eventually cancer.

The strategy has always been to nip the issue in the bud, thereby reducing the huge impact of adult smoking on the health-care system and public environment later down the road.

In Glendale, that message appears to be catching on. In 2006, an undercover survey found 24% of merchants were willing to sell tobacco to minors. This year, that number dropped to 10%.

While that progress can't be ignored, we still find it troubling that one in 10 merchants are still willing to sell cigarettes to teens. It's pretty easy to tell most teens 17 and younger from someone in their mid-30s, the benchmark under which clerks are supposed to ask for ID.

Clearly, there's still a ways to go on this front, but local health and code enforcement officials should be commended for moving the line this far.